OTF/FEO Interaction . . . on line

To be copied and shared with all members

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Dear Colleagues,

This is the last time that I will have the opportunity to write to you as the President of the Ontario Teachers' Federation. I didn't know quite what to expect as I started this year, but I have to say that the experience of being your president is one that I would not have missed.

It has been an exciting year, culminating in a provincial election campaign in May. While the Mike Harris government was reelected with another majority government, many people, including many teachers who have never before been part of an election campaign, volunteered and worked very hard. In that sense, it was a victory for democracy.

The election is over, we have a new Minister of Education and a newly restructured Ministry for just elementary and secondary education. It is time to move forward.

OTF secured funding from the Ministry of Education to run a series of summer institutes for the implementation of the new curriculum for elementary and secondary schools. There are 52 elementary courses and 15 secondary institutes. Judging by the numbers of teachers who have registered, teachers are eager to prepare themselves for next fall. The summer institute program is an excellent one and will help teachers a great deal in the challenges of the next school year.

Last January, as part of the OTF Strategic Plan, we started a series of community forums, entitled "Let's Talk about our Schools." We have had forums in Ingersoll, London, St Thomas, Orillia, Owen Sound and Whitby. There are already plans for a forum in Sudbury early in the new year. The purpose of the forums is to build a common vision with the people of Ontario for what an excellent publicly funded education system can and should be. For all of those who have taken part, these forums have been a positive and energizing experience.

I had the opportunity to be part of the community forum in Whitby, and I was impressed by the consensus among the participants on how we can improve our education systems to serve the best interests of our students. I would encourage you to get in touch with your affiliate representative in your school and find out how your local and your colleagues in the other affiliates can sponsor a community forum in your neighbourhoods.

I want to take this chance to tell you how much I have enjoyed being your president this year. The teaching profession continues to be one of the most noble of all professions.

The dedication of the individuals who choose to be teachers can never be doubted. Each and every one of you can be proud of what you do every single day in your classrooms. I thank you once again for allowing me to serve as OTF President. I have chosen to retire from full time teaching at the end of my term, but I will continue with occasional teaching and with my work as a councillor with the College of Teachers, so I won't be far away. I wish you a safe and restful summer, and also wish you well in the next school year.

Yours truly,

Liz Barkley

The OTF Executive held its regular meeting on June 19, 1999 at the OTF offices. Some of the issues addressed included:

College of Teachers

Several matters concerning the College of Teachers were on the agenda and the Executive made the following decisions:

- OTF will again sponsor a group of teacher candidates for election to the Governing Council of the Ontario College of Teachers.
- The Executive considered the consultation document on a professional learning framework that has been sent to selected members of the College.
- The College of Teachers workgroup and the Teacher Education workgroup will meet together in August to review the issues of mandatory professional development, ongoing professional learning and teacher testing.

The Executive met with the Vice-Chair of the Governing Council of the Ontario College of Teachers and the Registrar of the College.

Federation House

The owners of the building at 1260 Bay Street have sold the building. The OTF Executive approved a search for alternative space for the federation. Notice has been served that OTF will vacate the space at 1260 Bay as of December 31, 1999.

Summer Institutes

OTF and the Affiliates secured funding from the Ministry of Education and Training for summer institutes on curriculum implementation. Catalogues were sent to Ontario's English language schools early in June. Teachers have responded in overwhelming numbers. The deadline for applications is June 28. The catalogue and application form can be found

in the Summer Institutes Section

For francophone teachers, summer institutes have been coordinated by the six Centres and Networks of the French language school boards. Teachers seeking further information about the francophone summer institutes should contact their regional Centre or Network.

Trade Libel

Following the Political Protest of 1997, the government of Ontario ran a series of television ads purporting to tell the public what the teacher union leaders (the "Union Bosses") were asking for during negotiations. The ads totally misrepresented the teachers' positions. Consequently, the presidents filed a suit for libel against Mike Harris and David Johnson.

Last fall, the Government brought a motion before the courts for a summary judgement in our libel suit. That is to say, they asked the courts to dismiss the teachers' case for having no substance. The affidavits and depositions took place last October and November. The case was argued before Justice Macdonald in December 1998. The judge reserved judgement.

On Monday June 14, 1999, the judge issued his ruling. The Government's motion for a summary judgement was denied on every point, and the case permitted to progress. The Government has indicated it's intention to seek leave to appeal Justice Macdonald's ruling.

YNN

In May, the President of OTF wrote to the chairs of the school boards encouraging them to resist the overtures of Athena Education Partners to bring Youth News Network into the schools of Ontario. The Executive received for information letters of response from several school boards indicating that they are in full support of OTF's position that YNN is an inappropriate and unnecessary commercial incursion into our schools.

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